

Local Government in Japan



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FOREWORD

Amid dynamic changes in society brought about by the rapid development of information technology and diversification of people's values, there is renewed recognition of the role of local government as the administrative level closest to the people. Overseas as well, with the process of social change leading to diversification, it has become difficult to adequately address every issue with standardisation at the national level, and there is a widespread reevaluation of the powers held by various local authorities.

In Japan, the Omnibus Decentralisation Act came into force in April 2000 with the aims of clarifying the respective roles of national and local government, increasing the autonomy and independence of local authorities, and developing local communities that are full of vitality and rich in individuality. With these kinds of social changes taking place, I believe that sharing experience and expertise across national borders will contribute greatly to the future development of local government.

This book was created out of this awareness. It is designed to provide people involved in local administration overseas with a basic introduction to the current state of affairs of Japan's system of local autonomy. The book was first published in 1995 and has been revised and is now in its sixth revised edition. We have taken care to make the book easy to understand even for readers with no detailed knowledge of Japan's politics, administrative systems, or society.

Chapter One deals with special features of Japan's local administrative system, Chapter Two with local administrative functions, and Chapter Three with challenges facing local governments. Chapter Four provides an explanation of the system responsible for the many functions of Japanese local authorities, and Chapter Five an explanation of the recent trend toward decentralisation.

It is my sincere hope that this book will contribute, even if only a little, to the understanding of Japan's local autonomy system around the world.

March 31, 2005

Takahiro Kiuchi

Chairman of the Board of Directors

Council of Local Authorities for International Relations

Note: This publication is based on information available as of November 2004.

It is intended to provide basic information about local government in Japan. Detailed or exceptional matters have therefore been omitted.

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